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http://www.kokomotribune.com/indianakokomo/editorial-time-for-smoking-ban/article_523d45ea-feeaa-11e6-8112-d375d9fe657d.html

Editorial: Time for smoking ban

As Tribune reporter George Myers reported in today's paper, the Howard County Board of Commissioners and Kokomo Common Council will vote Monday on measures that would establish a county- and city-wide smoking ban in bars, taverns, private clubs and other places.

This is just the latest skirmish in a years-long local battle to decide the constraints placed on smokers in public places. In 2014, the common council left exceptions in the city to allow for smoking to continue in certain locations. This legislation would bring those outliers into line. Now, bars, taverns and social clubs would be included in the ban. E-cigarettes would now also be included.

The city itself has been attempting to tackle this problem for over a decade now, with much resistance from business owners where smoking is still allowed. It's high time we take away these exceptions and apply the ban county-wide.

The reasons for banning smoking in these establishments should be self-evident in 2017. And, even if you don't care about your own health, the lives of other patrons and those who are just trying to earn a living there should be worth preserving. As Howard County Commissioner Paul Wyman pointed

out, Howard County is listed in the bottom half of health rankings for Indiana's 92 counties.

Statewide we're not doing much better.

"In Indiana, 26.0 percent of the adult population (aged 18-plus years)—over 1,247,000 individuals—are current cigarette smokers," according to the Centers for Disease Control. "Across all states, the prevalence of cigarette smoking among adults ranges from 9.3 percent to 26.5 percent. Indiana ranks 50th among the states."

E-cigarettes should also absolutely be included in this ban along with traditional cigarettes and cigars. The science behind the safety of these devices is still new, but it's clear that even though they may be less harmful than cigarettes in some ways, they may still be quite damaging in others.

"We don't presently know what is in e-cigarettes," according to the American Lung Association. "However, in initial lab tests conducted in 2009 the FDA found detectable levels of toxic cancer-causing chemicals, including an ingredient used in anti-freeze, in two leading brands of e-cigarettes and 18 various cartridges."

We hope both legislative bodies will do the right thing Monday and approve the county-wide ban.